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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 2/03/09

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Articles:

1) N. Korea preparing to launch Taepodong missile

SANKEI (Top play) (Abridged)
February 3, 2009

North Korea is preparing to launch a Taepodong-2 long-range ballistic missile that can be tipped with a nuclear warhead, government sources revealed yesterday. U.S. and other reconnaissance satellites have confirmed the moves that are believed to be prepared for launching. The Taepodong missile will likely be readied in a month or two. North Korea is strongly opposed to the hardline stance of Japan and South Korea toward North Korea, so North Korea is believed to be preparing to launch a missile against it. However, North Korea, should it launch the missile, will inevitably bring about an international backlash. It will also likely have a serious impact on the six-party talks.

According to several government sources, U.S. and other reconnaissance satellites have confirmed trucks entering and going out of a new missile site currently under construction in Tongchang-dong in the northeastern North Korean province of Pyonganpukdo. A large missile container has been brought in. Judging from the container's size, the missile is believed to be the Taepodong-2 or a larger one.

North Korea has already been found to have conducted an engine ignition test at the launch facility by last fall. North Korean missiles use liquid fuel, which means that it will take considerable time to ready a missile on the launching pad and fuel it. Accordingly, its launch is highly likely to be a couple of months

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away.

2) Gov't, shipping industry to share shipping info for antipiracy measures

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Abridged)
February 3, 2009

The government, which is now planning to send two Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyers to waters off the coast of Somalia for an antipiracy mission, will start up an information network with the shipping industry by March to share such information as the running schedules of the two MSDF destroyers and Japanese merchant ships coming under the MSDF's protection. This information sharing will make it possible for the MSDF vessels and merchant fleets to check each other's navigational situation at once. It will be also conducive to Japan in its cooperation with U.S. and European Union naval ships currently deployed off the coast of Somalia.

The Land, Infrastructure and Transport Ministry, the Defense Ministry, and the Japanese Shipowners' Association, which is made up of shipping businesses, will cooperate to push for information networking. The shipping industry will provide the transport ministry in advance with such information as who owns ships and whether Japanese crewmen are onboard. In case shipping companies need to ask for protection, the transport ministry's antipiracy liaison office will be a point of contact.

The government and the ruling parties will send the MSDF destroyers by invoking an action for maritime policing activities under the Self-Defense Forces Law as a 'stopgap' measure until a new law for antipiracy measures is enacted. Under the law, the MSDF destroyers will convoy Japanese ships. In addition, the MSDF is also expected to protect Japan-linked ships, Japanese nationals onboard foreign ships, and Japanese shipments carried by foreign ships.

3) Somalia anti-piracy mission: Defense Ministry not to allow MSDF to join multinational forces to avoid use of force

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Top play) (Abridged slightly)
February 3, 2009

The Defense Ministry, which is considering dispatching (Maritime Self-Defense Force) destroyers and P-3C patrol planes on an

anti-piracy mission in waters off Somalia, plans to have the MSDF carry out activities independently without joining the multinational force framework in waters off Somalia due to restrictions under the Constitution and the SDF Law, it was learned yesterday. At the same time, the ministry intends to provide the multinational forces with information on detected pirate ships and send SDF personnel to the multinational forces for the coordination of operation of units.

There are two multinational forces engaged in anti-piracy operations in waters off Somalia: one led by the European Union (EU) and the other by the United States. Such countries as China, Russia and India do not belong to either group.

In the Gulf of Aden, the EU is running Operation Atalanta (headquartered in Britain) with the participation of destroyers of Britain, France, Germany, and Greece. They are engaged in two types of duties: (1) escorting United Nations World Food Program (WFP) vessels and commercial vessels, and (2) having special commando

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units onboard commercial ships.

The United States, with its command in Bahrain, is engaged in a variety of maritime operations. U.S.-led Combined Task Force (CTF-150) has been conducting surveillance activities in the Indian Ocean. The U.S.-led multinational forces set up CTF-151 on January 8 to deal with piracy in the Indian Ocean.

The MSDF has been conducting refueling operations for CTF-150 based on the New Antiterrorism Special Measures Law. But the MSDF has not joined the multinational forces for fear of resulting in the use of force which is prohibited under Article 9 of the Constitution.

CTF-151's activities are centered on cracking down on piracy, which the Japanese government has judged would not lead to the use of force. Still, the force has not ruled out an armed conflict with a state or state-like organization, namely a terrorist group. For this reason, the government has concluded that participation in CTF-151 would be difficult.

The EU's Operation Atalanta is specialized in anti-piracy operations. But because MSDF destroyers would be dispatched under a maritime policing clause in the SDF Law, they would be able to escort Japanese-related vessels only.

Unlike the EU, MSDF destroyers cannot protect all vessels desiring escort. The government, thinking that such might result in friction, is likely to give up joining the EU's operation, as well.

But based on the government's view that there is no problem in providing general information, information on pirate ships detected by P-3Cs will be provided to the U.S. military and the EU. The MSDF is also planning to send liaison officers to the multinational force command.

4) Defense Ministry plans on using government planes to bring Japanese nationals back home following outbreak of new strain of influenza overseas

YOMIURI (Page 1) (Abridged slightly)
February 3, 2009

The Defense Ministry has formulated its first action plan against new strains of influenza. If a new strain of flu breaks out overseas, commercial airlines will likely call off their flights, thereby making it impossible for Japanese nationals to return home. Envisaging such a case, the plan stipulates the dispatch of Self-Defense Force aircraft, including government planes, to protect Japanese nationals and the use of SDF hospitals. The plan will be announced as early as March.

In addition, the plan specifies the cooperation of SDF medical officers in the event airports and seaports become short of quarantine officers as a result of the repatriations of a large number of Japanese nationals.

In the event of an influenza epidemic, the SDF will transport food and daily necessities and provide water to affected areas.

SDF hospitals with no infectious disease beds will accept as many patients as possible only when there are patients that are beyond the capacity of general hospitals.

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A government-wide action plan, which was announced in 2005, is scheduled to be revised this month. Timed with this, the Defense Ministry has compiled additional measures.

5) Japan planning conference to assist Pakistan, possibly aiming to send love call to Obama administration

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
February 3, 2009

The government started preparations yesterday to host an international ministerial-level conference in Japan possibly in March to help the Pakistani government stabilize its economy. The U.S. Obama administration has given priority to Pakistan and Afghanistan as part of efforts to fight terrorism. Japan's move apparently reflects the Aso administration's eagerness to strengthen its ties with the Obama administration.

The government envisions the participation of European Union (EU) member countries and those near Pakistan. It intends to come up with an aid package worth billions of dollars, aside from the 7.2 billion dollars worth of package announced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) last year. The government is willing to carry out coordination with the participants on what share each country should bear.

Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Jun Matsumoto emphasized in a press conference yesterday: "Stability in Pakistan will contribute to quelling international terrorism, so this challenge is extremely important. Japan would like to lend support in a positive manner."

The Obama administration has regarded Afghanistan and Pakistan as main battlefields in the war on terror. This stance is behind the government's willingness to host an international conference.

The government intends to help reconstruct Afghanistan mainly in the economic, medical, and educational areas. In aid to Pakistan, as well, it harbors this expectation: If Japan plays a leading role in the international community, the Obama administration would welcome Japan's role and "there eventually may be a positive impact on Japan-U.S. relations." as a senior Foreign Ministry official said.

The government apparently is also hoping that the move will lead to an early meeting between Prime Minister Aso and President Obama in response to Aso's strong desire.

Good news for the Aso administration is an expected visit to Japan by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in mid-February as the first destination of her overseas trip in her new role. The government has welcomed it as representing her stance of placing importance on relations with Japan.

Even if Japan manages to hold an international conference of donors to Pakistan in Japan, though, it seems difficult to coordinate views on each nation's share of burden, given the ongoing global economic crisis. Japan's diplomatic skill will be tested there.

6) Thai premier to visit Japan for more investments

ASAHI (Page 2) (Full)
February 3, 2009

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Satoru Fujita, Bangkok

Thai Prime Minister Abhisit, who will visit Japan on Feb. 5, met the Japanese media yesterday in Bangkok and indicated his intention to call on Japan to expand its investments in Thailand. He stated:
"Japan is our country's top economic partner."

When asked about the political turbulence in Thailand, including an anti-government group's occupation of Bangkok International Airport, the premier stressed that Thailand has now overcome the worst situation. He said:

"Since I became prime minister (in mid-December), the situation has substantially returned to stability. I will put all my energy to regain public faith from now on as well."

"Investments from Japan are very important and there is room for more investments in our country," Abhisit said when asked about the reason for his decision to choose Japan for his second official foreign visit after his visit to Laos.

The opposition party and an organization supporting former Prime Minister Takshin have been calling for dissolving the Lower House for a general election. Asked about this move, Abhisit denied the possibility of an early dissolution, saying: "We are not in a situation to jeopardize the political stability."

7) DPJ may be going off track

SANKEI (Page 5) (Slightly abridged)
February 3, 2009

Weekly magazines and other sources predict an overwhelming victory of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in the next general election. There certainly is a possibility for the main opposition party to grab political power, but its recent moves are hard to understand.

President Ichiro Ozawa reportedly said in a meeting with senior members of the National Postmasters Association on Jan. 31: "The House of Representatives will surely be dissolved in March, after the budget for next fiscal year is enacted, and a general election will be held in April, at the latest." This means that he will cooperate in enacting the budget bill by the end of the current fiscal year.

Over the second supplementary budget bill, since the two houses came to different decisions, a meeting of the joint committee of the two chambers was held on Jan. 26. The senior Upper House member of the DPJ who was picked as chair by lottery easily declared to adjourn the meeting and allowed the passage of the supplementary budget a day late.

If the DPJ had tried to create the Image of the government and the ruling camp being driven into a corner after all-night deliberations, we would have been convinced. If the party was satisfied at the one-day-late passage, such is indisputably based on the same concept of the former Japan Socialist Party. What on earth was the joint meeting?

The DPJ was calling for removing the 2-trillion-yen cash handout plan from the government's second supplementary budget. If the party

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had demonstrated political power enough to draw out a pledge from the government to the 2 trillion yen for other purposes, it would have been able to score good points.

Deliberations on the budget bill for next fiscal year will soon start in the Lower House. The focus of attention will be on whether the budget bill will clear the Lower House later this month or in early March. In this case, the passage of the bill into law in this fiscal year will be confirmed, because the bill automatically receives Diet approval 30 days after it clears the Lower House. A passage in the first week of April is also regarded as enacted within the fiscal year.

The following is a scenario envisioned by the Liberal Democratic

Party to delay dissolving the Lower House: If the House of Councillors delays a vote on the budget-related bills, the government will resort to the override vote tactics 60 days after the bills are sent to the Upper House and will see the bills enacted after the May Golden Week holidays, with only one month left until the Diet is adjourned on June 3.

To undermine this scenario, it will be necessary for the opposition party to have the bills enacted at an early date. We wonder if Ozawa's remark is based on such a strategy. Has the DPJ been aware of the need for high-level tactics of enacting the budget and related bills within this fiscal year while raising opposition outwardly?

8) DPJ to square off with ruling parties in deliberations on extra budget; Ruling camp to fast-track FY2009 budget

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
February 3, 2009

The main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) has stepped up its adversarial stance against the ruling parties over deliberations in the House of Councillors on bills aimed to secure revenue sources for the second supplementary budget for fiscal 2008. The ruling coalition intends to give priority to deliberations on the budget for fiscal 2009. It is hard to expect when the related bills will obtain Diet approval.

Of the three related bills, the focus is being on a bill to secure fiscal resources for the cash-payout program and for a cut in highway tolls. As Finance Minister Shoichi Nakagawa will attend Lower House Budget Committee sessions every day from today, the Upper House Financial Affairs Committee will be unable to have time for deliberations.

In an informal meeting yesterday of directors from the Upper House Financial Affairs Committee, the ruling camp proposed holding deliberations in the Upper House after the Lower House Budget Committee session. The DPJ, however, turned down the proposal. Yoriko Madoka, who is a DPJ member and chairs the Upper House Budget Committee, said: "The Lower House should hold deliberations at night."

The LDP is strongly critical of the DPJ, saying: "The economic stimulus package has yet to be implemented due to the DPJ's delaying tactics." However, in a session of all Upper House members, DPJ Upper House Caucus Chairman Azuma Koshiishi rebutted: "We want to start deliberations, but Finance Minister Nakagawa will not attend."

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I cannot accept such criticism."

9) Lower House committee to initiate deliberations on fiscal 2009 budget

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
February 3, 2009

A House of Representatives committee will begin today interpellations on the government-drafted budget for fiscal 2009. With the attendance of Prime Minister Taro Aso and all other cabinet ministers, the ruling and opposition parties will start a full-scale debate. While the ruling coalition is aiming at getting the budget bill through the Lower House in mid-February, the opposition bloc, regarding the Budget Committee as the main political battle field, intends to thoroughly pursue the Aso administration focusing on four issues: 1) a consumption tax hike; 2) the practice of amakudari or placing retiring senior bureaucrats into high-paying posts at government-affiliated institutions and at private firms in the industries that they oversaw; 3) the plan of integrating the special account from road-related taxes into the general account; and 4) employment.

"Deliberations on the budget bill will start tomorrow. I am looking forward to an early enactment," Aso said in a Liberal Democratic Party executive board meeting yesterday, calling for cooperation

from the LDP.

Meanwhile, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the largest opposition force, plans to let Goshi Hosono take the floor as a questioner today and Naoto Kan, Seiji Maehara Akira Nagatsuma and Sumio Mabuchi tomorrow.

However, the budget for fiscal 2009 bill is certain to clear the Diet before the end of the current fiscal year. In the past, state budget bills were sent to the House of Councillors after deliberations for three weeks in the Lower House. If the Upper House takes a vote on a budget bill within 30 days after receiving it, the bill will naturally be passed the Diet. Thanks for the early convocation of the current Diet session on Jan. 5, deliberations on the budget started three to five days earlier than usual. A mid-level DPJ lawmaker said: "It is difficult to drag out deliberations until March in the Lower House."

Yet, the Upper House is still deliberating on bills related to the second supplementary budget for fiscal 2008, which includes the 2 trillion yen cash-handout program. The Lower House cannot execute a two-thirds overriding vote on the related bills before March 14. Focusing on this point, the DPJ may prevent the Lower House Budget Committee from opening its session, by asking Finance Minister Shoichi Nakagawa to attend deliberations on the related bills in the Upper House Financial Affairs Committee.

Moreover, it is uncertain when bills related to FY2009 budget will clear the Diet. Even if both the budget and related bills are passed through the Lower House in mid-February, the DPJ would delay deliberations in the upper chamber. If that is the case, a second vote in the lower chamber could slip to mid-April.

If such happens, an idea will emerge for submitting a stopgap bill designed to separate tax-cut measure on which the ruling and opposition camps can agree.

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ZUMWALT